



MEGITSUNE

by
Alessa

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by Alessa

She was beautiful.

That was all I noticed at first. There were all sorts of rumours about her, and no one could tell what was true and what was made up. Someone even claimed that she was Japanese, but no one knew for sure until her name gave her away. Akane Hoshino. Her accent was considerably better hidden, though, on account of her never speaking to a single person at school.

For the five to ten seconds I saw her every day, my heart did somersaults while I held my breath to hide the excitement building inside me. A teenager like her was capable of putting any supermodel to shame. A feat impossible to pull for a lowly mortal like me, yet it seemed almost second nature to her. Her steps were always graceful, and her strides remained swift and measured, as in a ballet dancer.

I saw her every day, but I doubt she even noticed me. Following sixth period, I would always take the same stairs that led closest to my locker. But what I soon discovered was that no one ever occupied the stairway whenever I walked through, aside from her. She would stay in her respective place to the right while coming down, myself going up on the left side. One side of her white school blouse was always fashionably disarranged, hanging outside of her dangerously short skirt, as if she wanted to set a new trend by sheer force of apathy and disrespect for school rules.

Her jet-black hair resembled silk, but every strand was in its destined place. She didn't even try, yet she managed to pull off that indifferent look of untouchable superiority that every teenage schoolgirl desires. Of course, she was the only one who truly accomplished it. Every other girl in the school looked like a mouse next to her. A dishevelled mouse.

It was driving me crazy. For the last three months, I have passed her in the stairwell. I would stare at her as long as possible, but her dark eyes never turned to the side. Instead, she focused on her path straight ahead, like an angelic deity undeterred by outside forces.

All my friends noticed her too, but in different ways from me. For example, my best friend Jenna Scarlett seemed to become inexplicably irritated at the mere mention of her. To our infinite amazement, it appeared that the girl of my obsession held no interest for anyone whatsoever, whether they loved her or loathed her. I don't think she had a single friend. Never had I heard her say a single word to anyone. Never had I seen her around town on weekends or at the movie theatres. It was as if she existed in a dimension set apart from common society.

I knew she was out of my league. Not that I dared approach other girls in that way, even if I had a chance of winning their hearts. I was still in a deep, dark closet about the object of my attraction, and besides, she had boys pining after her left, right, and centre. Needless to say, she paid no heed to any

single one of them, but it didn't make my cowardice any less painful. I had never seen her speak to anyone and never would.

Or so I thought...



It was a Friday afternoon, one of the dreariest days of the week. Sure, it was excellent that the weekend was right around the corner, but time appeared to travel slower as the clock inched towards the 2:27 mark. It never seemed to arrive, no matter how hard I stared at the clock above the door of my classroom.

By now, sixth period was finally over, and I was making the usual route up to my locker. I pushed open the door next to the main entrance, which led to one of the stairwells in our school and was one of the most convenient ways to cut through at least half the school. It was baffling why this was never used aside from myself and... *her*.

Sighing, I shifted my math binder and textbook from my right arm to my left. After a surprisingly hard fall yesterday during basketball practise, my knee was wrapped twice with bandages. I knew I was clumsy, but I never thought I would be reduced to a limping wreck of human misery for playing with a ball. Nevertheless, with my right hand supporting me against the stair handrail, I morosely limped my way up the stairs.

Suddenly, the weight in my left hand disappeared. I looked down in shock to see my books no longer in my grasp. I glanced to my left and nearly toppled over when I saw *her* holding my books in the crook of her arm.

Akane Hoshino was holding my books.

Oh, God.

"You... You don't have to..." I muttered, tucking a loose strand of hair behind my ears. I didn't want to focus all my attention on her face; I needed to do something else with my fingers. I knew if I got too distracted by her attractive features, I'd do something incredibly stupid and embarrassing.

Akane merely shook her head; a soft sigh came unexpectedly from her mouth. "No." Her voice was calm and soothing, with the cutest accent imaginable, almost making me melt into mush on the spot. "You're limping. It's the least I can do."

I let her voice wash over my body. It had this calming effect on me as I pushed down any refutations waiting to arise from my vocal cords.

I ended up nodding and continued my way up the last few steps. She walked slowly beside me, making sure not to rush my unsteady stride, then pushed open the door, almost hitting a few people who had unfortunately gotten in the way. The victims turned to voice their anger at the assailant, but when they

saw it was Akane, they quickly shuffled away. Her captivating presence alone made no one dare say anything bad to her.

It was almost awkward walking next to her. Everyone was staring at me in bewilderment, wondering how a girl like me had managed to stand next to Akane Hoshino for more than twenty seconds continuously. She was known for shutting out the human race, causing rumours about her only to multiply day by day. Of course, those rumours were only the products of jealous schoolgirls who had no life aside from making others feel guilty because they were a class above them.

"Where exactly are you going?" she spoke, her melodic voice ringing gently in my ears. I was almost spellbound by her voice before I realised I actually needed to respond to her question. I immediately blushed and pointed in the general direction of the Chemistry classroom.

"Next to the arts room," I replied as she nodded in response. If she had noticed my delayed reaction, she said nothing of it. I had come to the realisation that she never said anything more than she had to. Akane didn't even ask me how or when I had injured myself, unlike most of my friends, who probe and prod until they get their answers. Akane helped me because she felt an obligation, no questions asked.

We walked in silence, or more like, she glided while I hobbled to my locker. One of my friends, Melissa Tanner, was at her own locker beside me. I began fishing around with the combination as Akane leaned against the locker to my right.

Melissa suddenly looked up and grinned at me. "What's up?" she asked as my locker gently clicked open.

I shrugged and swung the school bag in front of my body to put away the extra books. "Nothing really. Math sucked as usual."

Melissa was about to respond, but she quickly froze. She was glancing over my shoulder as I followed her line of vision. I shouldn't have been surprised to see her focusing on Akane, who stood next to me, holding my text books. I graciously took my supplies as I nodded at her.

"Thank you," I whispered appreciatively. No words could actually express the gratitude I held for her. She could easily have left me to struggle up the remaining stairs and doors that would eventually stop my progress. Instead, she decided to aid me in my troubles.

I couldn't thank her enough.

"You're welcome," she replied in that adorable voice, before turning to her left and walking down the stairs. I stood there in silence, wondering if she would come back and ask me for my name, ask me *anything*. But she had disappeared, and it wasn't until Melissa punched me in the shoulder that I finally snapped out of it.

"Since when were you two friends?" She laughed, grabbing the water bottle on the top shelf of my locker. She handed it to me as I shoved it into my bag.

"Since never," I shrugged, shutting the door. "I was limping up the stairs, and she just turned to help me with my books. She doesn't even know my name, which is why it surprises me."

"Hmmm..." Melissa sighed, tapping her chin in mock thought. "Maybe she sees something in you and wants to be a part of society again. Maybe she's finally coming out of her shell."

I punched her in the arm as she walked into her classroom, her laughter ringing down the hallways.



The next day, I took my usual route up the desolate staircase. Except this time, I wasn't the only one walking up. I looked to my right to see an unfamiliar guy trying to pass me by.

"Hey, watch it!" he growled assertively. His voice was somewhat raspy, as if he had yelled too much at someone not long ago.

I looked at him oddly, then reached around him to grip the railing to my right. Seeing my bandaged knee, he swerved around me, so I could move without trouble. I shrugged, hobbling uncomfortably up the stairs. The pain in my knee was greater than yesterday as I squirmed under the guy's scrutinising eyes. For some reason, I never functioned properly under inspection.

"I'm sorry, it's my knee..." I found a tidbit of courage to voice my apology.

"Then why don't you just stay the hell out of the stairwell?" He smirked and shook his head.

"Matt, leave her alone."

I stumbled as I heard the voice behind me. I looked up and saw Akane standing next to someone I now knew as Matt. Akane remained calm and collected, but there was an annoyed look creeping on her face.

"What do you think you're doing?" She all but spat her question at the guy.

"I was curious," Matt said, glancing at me, then back at her. "When was the last time you talked to someone?"

Akane sighed and ran a hand through her long, charcoal hair. Her fingers made it fan out around her shoulders like a demonic halo made of silk, only for it to fall back perfectly in its place. My breath hitched slightly as her eyes focused on me. It wasn't an unknown fact to me that I was attracted to her, while at the same time she probably thought of me as a minor annoyance. So much even I could tell. However, this sudden attention she was giving me was baffling. Even in my wildest fantasies, I couldn't see why she would be interested in someone like me. But who am I to complain? I'd wanted her to see me at least once before the end of the school year, and now it was happening.

"Not now, Matt," she said. "If you were so interested, you could've asked me yesterday during fifth period. Besides, can't you see she's injured?" Akane turned her head in my direction. "If you actually cared, you would've helped her carry her stuff. It's the last you could've done."

With that said, Akane continued down the stairs, much to my disappointment. Whoever this Matt person was, he had ruined any chance of me walking with Akane again. But then I felt my books being

plucked from my hold as Matt continued walking in front of me. He strolled at a slow pace, being sure not to get too far ahead of me.

After thanking him for holding the door open for me, I quickly looked at him. He had dishevelled brown hair that stood about an inch above his head, and an impressive tan for this time of the year. He must have caught me looking, for his blue eyes locked with my own. I blushed and looked down, an effect that seemed to take place every time someone showed interest in me.

"We share some classes," he answered for me, as if understanding the question forming in my mind. "She hasn't talked to anyone since she transferred here, which is why it was such a shock when I saw the two of you walking together through the hallway the other day. She shouldn't be surprised I noticed and questioned."

I nodded at his explanation. "You seem to know more about her than you let on."

"Not really. She caught my interest when I first saw her," he explained. "I wanted to find out more about her, but she ignored me and anyone else who tried to approach her." His eyes moved down the hallway, teeming with students. It looked as if I had touched a raw nerve in his memory.

"She's probably not confident in her English, that's all," I tried to reason or defend her or something. I was sure there must have been another side to Akane.

"Her English is better than you may think. My aunt works in the school administration, so she told me some things about her," Matt suddenly said as I did a double take. "Akane lives by herself in a student dormitory. Apparently she's some kind of smart-ass genius here on a student exchange programme."

I was speechless as I gaped at him. I must have stopped walking, for he nudged me lightly with his shoulder. Picking up my stature, I paused in front of my locker without seeing Melissa next to me. "How is that even possible? She's only fourteen, like the rest of us," I muttered, swiftly opening my locker.

Matt let out a gentle laugh that still contained hints of his raspy voice. "I don't know, I'm just passing on the information." He handed me my Math books, and I threw them in the locker. "The confusion on your face is priceless. Who wouldn't be curious about the almighty Megitsune?"

"Huh? Wha—What's that?" I gawked at him, bewildered.

"It's Japanese," Matt snickered.

"I figured out that much. But what does it mean?"

"Megitsune is the nickname that guys gave her. Do I have to spell everything out to you?"

I sighed exasperatedly, wanting to smack him on the head. "Translation, Matt! What does it mean?"

"It means vixen," he grinned. "Quite appropriate, don't you think?"

I shut my locker and turned to him. Leaning my shoulder against the metal wall, I crossed my arms. "Question. Since you seem to be a little more open than Akane..." He scoffed incredulously but allowed me to continue. "Does she know my name?"

Everything was silent for a moment before he gave me the dreaded answer. "No," he shook his head. "Akane doesn't care about you or anyone else, for that matter. Even when another student is sitting next to her during class, she doesn't know their name. Have you ever had a class with her?"

When I told him that I hadn't, Matt let out a sigh. "Well, to tell you the truth, you're wasting your time with her. Don't expect her to ever know, either. If you ever had your hopes up to be her friend, you should probably stop. It won't work." He paused for a moment, glancing down at his cell phone. "You seem like a nice enough girl. I don't want you to get hurt by Megitsune. Even if she doesn't try to hurt anyone, it still happens. Stay away from her." I looked at him, hoping for an explanation, but he just scoffed at me. "Don't tell me I didn't warn you."

Matt turned away, brushing my shoulder gently with his own as he walked down the same stairs Akane helped me climb the previous day. And once again, I was left to think over everything by myself.



Apparently, my hobbling around the school without proper support resulted in me further damaging my knee, and I was now forced to wear a real brace instead of just a few bandages. I found it even more difficult to walk, as I literally jumped up the stairs with my right foot dragging behind me. At the rate I was making my progress up the stairs, I knew I would be late for band practise. But hell, the teacher surely couldn't be mad at me for being injured.

I looked down, cautious of where the steps were. Knowing my luck, I'd trip on my own feet and break another bone. Suddenly, a pair of Converse sneakers appeared on the step in front of me. Startled, I glanced up to see those dark eyes staring me down. She reached and grabbed my books from me and used her other free arm to hold onto my upper arm. I instantly stiffened as the contact sent an electric spark through my entire body.

Akane must have noticed this, for she quickly pulled back, much to my disappointment. I continued to stumble my way up the stairs, with her walking beside me. Her hand was poised in front of her, ready to catch me in case I fell backwards and plummeted down to my death. Fortunately, I managed to make my way to the top without further injury as I limped to the door. I tried to pull it open while walking through, but that didn't exactly work out so well. In the end, she ended up holding it for me as I ambled through, not quite as gracefully as her.

Like before, all eyes were focused on us while Akane walked with me down the hall. I must have looked like a fool with her in my presence, more so because, unlike me with my clumsy blundering,

Akane never made any mistakes. Her actions were precise and articulate, while I looked like a bumbling drunk following her footsteps.

She must have noticed my unease eventually, since she gave me a sidelong glance. Though I made an effort to keep my eyes straight, I couldn't help but turn to look at her again.

Her eyes were questioning, yet indifferent, as I stopped. I opened my mouth to talk, but she quickly shook her head. I didn't really know how to respond to that.

Her eyes fixated on me before she began speaking. "Don't," she said, so softly that I had to lean closer to her to hear her words. "I know what you were going to ask me, so don't ask."

She continued walking away, as I tried to keep up. Her shoulders were tense, but I soon saw them loosen up. Akane turned around and waited for me to catch up to her. When I was within her hearing range again, her fingers gently touched my elbow, urging me to walk on.

Reaching my locker, we went through the ritual of her handing me the books and me throwing them in before she disappeared down the stairs again. After she'd leave, I would stand there for a few seconds before walking into the classroom. The entire time, I couldn't get her out of my mind. Without her even knowing it, she was constantly haunting my thoughts. She was always there with me as my imagination carried us to another world.

But it was only a dream, my imagination, my fantasy... What more could I expect from the haughty Megitsune?



The next few weeks went by in a blur. I would come out of the Math classroom and walk up the same empty staircase. Halfway, Akane would quietly meet me and take my books out of my hands as I limped up the stairs. When we reached my locker, it would be deathly silent between us as I packed away my belongings.

That was all our encounters ever amounted to. To me, it was disappointing how I couldn't progress our "friendship" to the stage of talking. Actually, it was ridiculous. We never spoke more than two words to each other, let alone looked at one another.

By now, the semester was over, so my Math class had changed its usual time slot. Not only that, but I was officially off my stupid brace. I was free to walk, run, skip, and climb as I pleased. But both of these factors combined into one great disaster for me. Knowing my luck, I would never pass by Akane again in that staircase. My sixth period of Math class was officially over, as was whatever class she had. Unless through a stroke of extreme luck, I wouldn't be passing her in the halls anymore.

Furthermore, I was capable of holding my own books. Even if luck was on my side for the semester, there was no reason for her to walk with me to my locker. I could walk perfectly on my own two feet without assistance.

It really was a pity. I almost wanted to get injured again.

As I walked through the science wing after sixth period on the first day of the second semester, I kept my eyes open for the object of my secret infatuation. For this entire day, I hadn't seen Akane anywhere, not even during lunch in the cafeteria, where I occasionally saw her last semester. This was basically my last chance of seeing her before spring break, and nothing was going my way.

I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket as I groaned. It wasn't even a text; what inconsiderate person was calling me in the middle of the school day? Fully aware that any teacher would take away my phone for using it in between classes, I bent my head down and pulled the speaker up to my ear. My hair spilled freely over the device as I answered the call.

"Chrissy," Melissa's voice crackled over the speaker. "Jenna, Kirsten, and I are going to the movies today after school. Are you coming?"

"Melissa, why the hell are you calling? Couldn't you have just texted?" I hissed, staring down at the ground as I walked. "But yeah, sure, I can go," I added hastily, not wanting to miss the fun with my friends.

"Tsk," she replied. "Not everyone has unlimited texting like you do. Some unfortunate people in this world don't have that opportunity."

I opened my mouth to shoot back a retort, but I suddenly slammed straight into someone's chest. Fearing a teacher, I shoved my phone back into my pocket and looked up at the obstacle in front of me. As luck would have it, the raven-haired vixen herself stared down at me, a small smile gracing her lips. Slowly, she released my arms, as if making sure I was safe again. I hadn't even realised she was holding onto me until she apologised for doing so.

"No, it's my fault. I wasn't watching where I was going," I whispered and stepped around her. I don't even know what brought me to do that. It had been my day-long dream to run into her just once. But I never wanted to actually slam into her like a total klutz. I wanted to be able to see her from a distance, unnoticed, walking in the opposite direction of me, so I could admire her beauty and grace and that unattainable air of perfection that no one else was able to match.

But actually slamming into her? That wasn't how I expected our encounter to happen. I knew I was a clumsy girl, but embarrassing myself like this was not how I envisioned sparking romantic interest in her.

I could feel her eyes follow me out of the hallway, but I paid no attention. After all, since when did I care about a girl who didn't even know my name?



It was only beneficial to my mental state if I avoided that hallway from that day on. I had to make sure I never saw Akane again. It became essential for me to shield myself from catching another glimpse of Akane. Her entire existence was addictive, but I needed to stay away from her or I'd lose my sanity. She was ingrained in my mind, and she was all I could think about during my waking hours, but I had to resist the temptation to be near her.

But now, instead of that familiar flawless face amongst the crowd of students, I saw only Matt. I still didn't know what his last name was after our first meeting. After all, I never spoke to him again after those final ten minutes in the stairwell. His brown hair was no longer as unruly and was now swept to the side. His eyes shone brightly as he walked down the hallway with... a cell phone pressed to his ear.

He didn't recognise me as I passed by his side. I couldn't help but follow his figure. The phone bounced lazily against his cheek as he spoke into it. Other teachers saw him but said nothing. This was probably not the first time, and most likely had given up on reprimanding him on an issue he would pay no attention to.

I shook my head and walked into the band classroom. Most of the students were already there, setting up their instruments and mingling with each other. Mr. Grant was sitting in the conductor's chair, staring at me as I walked down the stairs into the general area. I retrieved my clarinet from the lockers in the back and weaved through the chaos of chairs thrown about.

I greeted a few of my friends and sat down next to Jenna Scarlett in the front row.

"Hey," I said, placing the case on my lap. Just as I was about to set up the clarinet, my phone beeped once, indicating an incoming text message. I looked up fearfully in the teacher's direction, but Mr. Grant was no longer sitting in his seat. I pulled out my phone and quickly read the message.

Lower atrium, vending machine. 13:30.

I sighed and put my phone away. The clock currently said 12:45. Whoever this was actually followed the fifteen-minute rule our school instituted in order to keep students from leaving the building during the disastrous times between classes.

"Chrissy!" Jenna suddenly called, turning to face me. "What's going on?"

I stared at her in bewilderment. "What are you talking about?" I asked in retaliation.

Jenna rolled her eyes at me, laying a hand on my shoulder. "Chrissy..." she sighed. "You've been my best friend for I don't even know *how* long. I know you well enough to know something's going on. Aside from that, what the hell is going on between you and that what's-her-name social outcast?" In the last part, she dropped her voice to a whisper.

Her question was the same one circulating around the entire school. Any topic concerning Akane was hot gossip. After all, she was the most sought-after and, equally, most unattainable girl in the entire

district. If any eavesdroppers heard my conversation with Jenna, no doubt my response to her question would spread like wildfire through the grapevine.

"Someone just texted me," I sighed, giving in to her probing. I pulled out my phone and showed it to her. Not letting her speak, I continued. "I'm still debating whether I should go, 'cause it might be the wrong number. Yet a small, nagging part of me is telling me I should. And secondly..." I dropped my voice to less than a whisper, "Her name is Akane, and nothing's going on between us. I was injured after my fall at the basketball practise, and she saw me and offered to help me. She just carried my stuff to my locker, and she barely said a word to me, so we're *not* exactly *friends*, let alone anything else you might be *alluding to*," I said, placing emphasis on the last two words.

Jenna scoffed, placing her clarinet sideways across her lap. "Sure. Then what about that Matt kid you've been seen hanging around with?"

I threw my arms into the air in exasperation. Do I have to explain everything to her? "That was weeks ago!" I hissed. "I only talked with him once for less than three minutes, and now he doesn't even know who I am. In fact, Akane and Matt both have no idea what my name is. So ultimately, who cares?"

At that moment, Mr. Grant raised his right arm, indicating that the Wind Ensemble should be quiet. For the first time ever, I was glad not to talk to Jenna. Silently, we sat through Mr. Grant's announcements, as I constantly looked up at the dragging time. Finally, Mr. Grant began the warm-up chords with the circle of fourths just as the clock hit 1:29.

I placed my clarinet down on my chair and cast Jenna a look. She nodded at me as I walked away. I didn't even know why I was going to meet this stranger. What if I showed up and it was just some random guy I had never met before? God, I might as well just try to pull it off as 'I'm going to the bathroom. Shut up.'

I grabbed the green plastic hall pass from its place and walked down the hall, towards the exit. My steps began to falter, and my knees shook with anticipation. My right knee was still susceptible to extreme pain, and I knew my high-strung nerves would be the end of my walking capabilities.

Less than a minute later, I found myself in the lower atrium. It was completely empty.

I scanned the vicinity and saw no one by the vending machine, not even the usual junior grade kids buying their drinks and snacks. I let out a huff and diverted my path towards the girls' bathroom. But before I could take a step in that direction, I heard a door slam shut from across the atrium. I spun around and saw *her* walking towards me. I suddenly stopped breathing, and my heart began beating erratically. God, I hated how she could do this to me every time, even though she had *no* idea what my name was.

The Gods truly despised me.

Her eyes landed on me for a split second, and she halted. I blushed under her scrutiny before turning away. Maybe she wasn't here to meet me; maybe she wasn't the person who had left me a text message. There was a huge possibility that we just happened to meet by fate once again.

My brain was beginning to melt under the intense thinking. I shook my head. I had to leave now, before the situation got out of hand.

I spun around and began to head back towards the band classroom. But before I could get anywhere, Akane spoke so quietly that I almost couldn't hear her.

"Wait."

I faced her again, her dark eyes drilling holes into me.

"How did you get my number?" I whispered, not moving from my spot.

"Your friend, Melissa, gave it to me. She's in my English class," Akane responded, while taking a step closer to me. "Why'd you walk away so quickly when you ran into me yesterday after sixth period?"

I stared past her shoulder, unwilling to be sucked into those trance-like eyes of hers. I couldn't bring myself to explain the situation to Akane. The truth was that I needed her out of my life. My feelings for her were developing far too fast for my liking. I wasn't ready for it yet—for facing my fears and everyone's scrutiny. I wasn't ready to come out about my attraction to this incredible girl and girls in general. But how could I explain that to her without sounding like a coward and a wimp? I couldn't like her; she was *the* most desired girl in the entire school. Even if she liked girls and I had a chance with her, which was doubtful, there were hundreds of other girls who would be a better choice than me.

"I..." I paused slightly, backing away from her slowly. If she was confused by my actions, she definitely didn't show it. She stood there, a foot away from me, as I blindly grasped for an excuse, any excuse, without revealing the truth about walking away from her the other day. "Akane. Why me?"

Her eyes suddenly turned hard as she took a large step towards me. She pushed me suddenly with her hands against the vending machine, so I couldn't move anywhere.

"I told you not to ask that question," she whispered close to me, her lips gently brushing against my ear. I was slowly melting from feeling her closeness and her breath against my skin. Had my right arm not been gripping her shoulder, I would've collapsed.

"And why is that, Akane?" I responded just as quietly.

She let out a stiff breath but didn't move. "There's a lot you don't know about me, Chrissy."

Anything she said after that went in one ear and out the other.

She had just said my name. Akane knew who I was. That was all I ever needed in my life—her acknowledging my existence. Maybe life wasn't so hopeless after all.

Anyone walking into the atrium would've taken our position the wrong way. My hand was clasped tightly to her shoulder, while hers was gripping my waist flush to her body. Her head was bent close to my ear, giving us the appearance of an intimate couple, yet we were anything but.

Seeing Akane like this was far different from my own expectations. I had always viewed her as one of those quiet, shy girls who don't make more drama than absolutely necessary. She also didn't appear to

me as one of those who went for the close touching when it came to confrontations such as this. But apparently, I was completely wrong.

"Akane, you ought to know," I managed to say through my own conflicts. My mind was telling me to shut up and stop talking at that instant, but I knew I had to keep going. No one could stop me from saying what I had to say, not even if it meant destroying my reputation, or losing my friends, or even breaking up whatever connection I had with Akane. After all, we never had much of a friendship to begin with, so even if I did manage to ruin it, what difference could it possibly make?

"Think before you speak, Chrissy," she interrupted before falling silent. It was almost as if she didn't want me to say whatever I had on my mind. But it was too late now. I was already on the road to accomplishing this feat. I couldn't have her pull me back, not when I had already gone this far.

"No," I retorted. "You have this effect on me, Akane, and back then, I couldn't place my finger on it. In my eyes, you were the most perfect girl I had ever seen in my life. You were always such a mystery to me; I couldn't figure you out. Then, all of a sudden, you helped me carry my books after I got injured." I sighed, remembering those silent moments we shared. "It showed me a different side of you, a side that was willing to help, even if you always preferred to stay away from other students."

"Chrissy—" she began, but I quickly cut her off.

"Shut up, Akane," I snapped back at her. "I've finally figured it out." I took a deep breath and shut my eyes. I could do it; I knew I could. After all, I've had a full... *five*... minutes to think about it. "All this... it's my fault. You know why? Because I've somehow managed to fall in love with a girl. And out of all the people, that girl happened to be *you*," I sighed and continued speaking. "I was attracted to you all this time; I knew as much. And I knew nothing would ever happen. But in the end, I let it all fall out of proportion because I was hoping there was another side to you, Akane. I thought you were a better person, but even when you helped me, you treated me like I was invisible. So now you can go on without me in your life. It's not like you care about the people around you. It was nice knowing you in the meantime," I added, before tearing myself out of her grasp.

With the green pass in my left hand, I dragged it against the wall as I walked down the ramp towards the music room. I half wanted her to come after me, but I knew it wasn't in her system to do that. She wasn't a hopeless romantic like me. In fact, I could easily see her playing with girls' hearts when she was in college. She couldn't care less about anyone's feelings.

It was over.



The backyard of our house looked like the opening scene of an apocalypse movie as I dragged my feet along the ground. The grass was brown and faded from months of frost and ice. I kept my hoodie pulled close around my body as I shuffled towards the garden bench. It was the second day of spring

break, though it didn't feel like anything but winter. I shivered and cursed the idea of going outside to clear my head as the unrelenting wind cut right through my pink-sheep pyjama pants. Classy, I know. But it's not like there was anyone around to judge or care.

I'm not sure how long I stayed there. Ten, maybe fifteen minutes. When my feet started getting numb from the cold, I decided it was time to head back inside the house. I walked up to my room and closed the door behind me. Everything was quiet. I guessed everyone had gone out except for my little brother, who was, as per usual, left under my watch.

I reached for a random book on my bookshelf and tried to stop depressing over my bleak and disheartening love life. Surely, reading about other people's miseries was more interesting than dwelling on one's own failures.

Just as I was about to flip the page, a knock echoed through my room. I turned around and squawked unattractively when I saw *her* standing in my doorway.

I had tried so hard to get her image out of my mind after our final encounter in the lower atrium two weeks ago. I went out of my way to avoid her path in the hallways, and luckily we never had any classes together. But still, there was a part within me that was aching from her absence.

The most important thing was that I had managed to get all my feelings off my chest before we parted our ways. The ball was in her court; she could take it or leave it. I suppose that was why she was in my room now, seeking closure, redemption... or the final goodbye.

"How did you know where I live and who the *hell* let you in?" What started as mere curiosity came out as hostility. I covered my mouth with a hand, wanting to take back the bitter connotation.

But if Akane was offended, she showed nothing. She walked into the room and quietly shut the door behind her. "Your friend Jenna gave me your address," she replied, sinking down on the bed next to me. I was still lying on my stomach, my open book in front of my face. "And your little brother let me in without a question."

I rolled my eyes. Brian, that little twerp. If Jack the Ripper appeared on the doorstep, he would let him in after offering a plate of chocolate chip cookies. Brian never asked questions, which, I could tell, would be his ultimate downfall.

"Why are you here?" I asked, throwing the book I was reading across the room and sitting up cross-legged on the bed beside her.

"Never ask why, Chrissy. There's never a why. Everything we do is by impulse."

"Akane... I don't understand you," I said, struggling to re-word my phrase. What the hell did it mean anyway? Apparently, Akane was a reflective girl who did in-depth thinking. What should I expect next? She's actually a brain surgeon teaching anatomy at Oxford? A Buddhist nun? Who knows...

"No one does," she suddenly grinned, her eyes following the contours of my body and down my legs. Only then did I become aware of my appearance. I realised I was still wearing my pink-sheep pyjama

pants that Mom had bought for my fourteenth birthday and a white Hello Kitty T-shirt. God, I must've looked like a toddler next to her.

"That's why I chose to come. I don't know why I did, but my intuition told me I should, because apparently there's something I have to tell you." She suddenly fell silent as she stared at me. Her dark eyes pulled me into her world, a world where only the two of us existed.

Hah! As if she ever imagined that. If anything, in her idealistic world, I wouldn't exist because of my previous outburst and my love confession, which probably grossed her out so much that she couldn't bear to talk to me until now.

"Listen," I sighed, running a hand through my light brown hair. "If this is about two weeks ago in the atrium, you can forget about it. You don't need to rub it in my face. It's obvious to anyone that you don't like me the way I like you. I can understand that much. But can *you*, Akane? I know you won't tell me, but whatever your reason is for coming here, I don't need to hear it," I rambled, watching my hands tremble under the pressure.

I really needed to learn how to shut up sometimes.

"I don't know what it is, Chrissy," she replied, her soft voice and the same cute accent washing over my senses. I instantly calmed down at the sound of her voice, which was honestly quite pathetic. "And I doubt you really understand it yourself." She suddenly froze before lifting her right hand.

What came next threw me off guard. Her index finger gently pushed my chin up until our eyes locked. Her left hand softly gripped my arm as she pulled me up, closer to her.

"There's something about you that I can't place. I felt an urge to help you when you couldn't get up the stairs by yourself. I could just as easily have left you to fend for yourself, but something inside me told me otherwise."

What? Was she actually suggesting... No way!

"Wait," I said, but Akane quickly cut me off.

Her lips brushed softly against mine, making my heart shoot up inside my chest. I took a deep breath through the nose when I realised my airway was suddenly cut off. Oh God, she was kissing me. Akane Hoshino was kissing *me*, Chrissy Cornell, a grade-A dork and misfit. I thought this was all a dream until I managed to wrap my arms around her neck and play with the soft, black hair that cascaded like a midnight waterfall down her back.

Her hands held me at my hips as she tilted her face slightly to ease the discomfort. I was so engulfed in the kiss, I couldn't hold back anymore. I pushed myself against her body, feeling her own heart race at the same speed as mine. I readily parted my lips, allowing her soft tongue to gently skim across my lower lip.

Feeling Akane in my mouth was all that was needed to make me realise that I was doing the impossible. Unable to restrain myself, I openly moaned into her lips while being held tightly against her.

That was when it dawned on me. I shouldn't be doing this. No. Akane wasn't capable of holding onto anyone for longer than a bat of her lovely eyelashes. I couldn't do it. I tore my lips away from hers, managing to put an inch of distance between us.

"No," I whispered, shaking my head as Akane brushed her lips against my cheek. "We can't." I managed to gasp when she placed a soft kiss on my earlobe. I pushed her away. "You don't date. You don't even talk to anyone."

"I don't," she readily agreed, causing my heart to shatter at her admission. My predictions had come true. Being with Akane would only destroy me. Why had I not listened to myself earlier, *before* I had fallen in love with her? Oh, curse my stupidity!

"Then... then what the hell makes you think you can do this to me?" I spat, trying to pull myself away. I tried to cover up my disappointment with anger, but the tears threatening to spill were about to destroy my mask. "Just because you're this beautiful, smart girl doesn't mean you can go about breaking another girl's heart by kissing her like you just did with me."

"So you're saying you liked it?"

"That's irrelevant!"

"But effective."

"What are you talking about, Akane?"

"I'm saying you enjoyed it. Am I wrong?"

"You really know how to be an asshole. And here I was, thinking you were one of the few girls who still had a heart and sense of kindness left in their blood."

"You talk too much, Chrissy. Let me kiss you again; you know you like it."

"Why? So you can break my heart a third time?"

Akane was quiet for the few seconds after our brief back and forth. But after my final comment, she didn't say a word. I knew I had stepped over the line of her emotional capacity, but I couldn't let her stomp over my heart like this. Though I had ultimately fallen in love with this gorgeous yet strange and frustrating girl, I wouldn't let her know she still had the upper hand in this relationship.

"Chrissy, you should know something," she suddenly moved away from me. "You want to know why I avoided you all this time? It's because I'm selfish. It's... it's because I only think about my own feelings," she looked out the window at the desolate garden outside. "I knew I would be going back home to Japan eventually. That's right," she added, after seeing my stunned expression. "I'm leaving next week."

"I don't understand. It's not even the end of the school year," I gasped, struggling to understand her.

"But that's how it has to be, Chrissy," she sat next to me. "I can't stay here forever, and that's why falling in love with you was not something I had planned. I tried my best to stay out of everyone's

business, but above all, I didn't want to fall in love with anyone. It sounds crazy, but I knew that in the end, it would only break my heart if I did. But you, Chrissy... You've messed up my plans, and now everything I tried so hard to avoid is becoming a painful reality."

"So, wait," I stopped her in disbelief. "This entire time, you've... liked me?"

Akane smiled, something I had never seen her do before. "Of course. Why else do you think I jumped so quickly at the opportunity to help you when I saw you injured? Why else do you think Matt suddenly approached you the next day, and why did I tell him to get lost? Because he knew what was happening and he didn't like it. He knew I liked you, Chrissy, and he couldn't stand someone else coming between him and me. Poor Matt. But it was too late for him by then, because I already knew I was in love with you. I just couldn't have you know. In fact, I was about ready to let it wear off by itself, but I couldn't stop thinking about you. I wanted to tell you that day in the atrium, but..." she drifted off, obviously going back to our encounter. I blushed as her eyes focused on me again. "Your confession surprised me, and I didn't know how to respond," she whispered. "Chrissy, I'm really..."

But before she could continue, I had already thrown myself at her. Her arms instantly went around my waist as she welcomed my lips and kissed me back. I captured her mouth with the same passion, and I felt her smile against me.

We remained inseparable until we had to break apart when we ran out of air. She was smiling, but I was not. "You stupid, stupid girl," I punched her in the shoulder. "You wasted so much time because you didn't want to get hurt, but now... Now it's only going to be worse because there is no time left to do anything!" I despaired, still in disbelief at the situation we found ourselves in.

"It's not all over yet," her mouth found my neck, and I shivered at the touch. Then she pushed me down on the bed, and her eyes found mine. "We've got a few more days to ourselves, Chrissy. Let's not waste this time blaming each other for falling in love."

I grinned and rolled her on her back just in time for my little bother to come charging through the door. His shriek at witnessing our limbs entwined, and our lips locked, brought us back from the passionate embrace. I smiled at Akane as Brian ran screaming out the door.

Akane didn't smile back. A placid, calm look settled on her face. But the feeling of her fingers wrapping around my own was all the reassurance I ever needed. We had less than a week to ourselves, but I was determined to get to know the first girl I fell in love with like I'd never known another girl before.

The End